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Memorandum

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THE POSITION OF ADMIRAL DARLAN

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Should Admiral Darlan succeed Marshal Petain as chief of the Vichy Government, he might be expected to yield to German demands for further naval and military concessions in the Mediterranean and North Africa.

Four factors support such a conclusion:

1. Darlan's long-standing hatred of England
2. His belief in a German victory
3. His record of concessions to Germany on African questions in recent months
4. His apprehension lest Pucheu, Minister of the Interior, receive Nazi backing for his unlimited ambitions by promising to outdo Darlan in "collaboration."

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At the present moment, when fresh German demands on France may result in the resignation of Petain and a new scramble for power among the rival Vichy cliques, the position of Admiral Darlan as the successor officially designated in advance by the Marshal is of capital importance.

Although sometimes suspected by the Germans[1] and generally reputed an ambitious opportunist, Darlan may be classed as a full-fledged collaborationist. It is essential, however, to distinguish his collaborationism from that of Petain, on the one hand, and of Pucheu, present Minister of the Interior, on the other.

Petain may be said to be a collaborationist under pressure, with the sword of Damocles held over his head by the Germans. The aged Marshal has manfully kept up resistance in the name of France to rising Nazi demands, e.g., for the passage of troops to Spain or the Mediterranean or for the use of the French fleet or of French bases in North Africa. But the scrap of paper of the armistice agreement is a poor weapon in his hands against Germans who possess absolute military power and can exploit as well Petain's deep concern for the hundreds of thousands of pollus imprisoned in the Reich.[2] Under further pressure, he might resign.

1Paul Archinard of M.E.C., Vichy, to John P. Royal, N.B.C., New York, July 23, 1941.

2.Cf. Murphy to Hull, Algiers, Nov. 22, 1941, #533.

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At the opposite extreme stand Pucheu and his associates in the Banque Worms group. These men are collaborationists both from conviction that Germany will win the war and from love of the Nazi political and social system. They are above all interested in finding a rewarding economic position in Hitler's New Order. Pucheu's ambition makes his readiness to collaborate limitless.[3]

3. Matthews to Hull, Vichy, Oct. 15, 1941, Dispatch; Huddle to Hull, Bern, Dec. 20, 1941, #999.

The position of Darlan is unique, in that he is collaborationist primarily from hate rather than from fear or love. His hate is England, a hate which has cropped out at frequent intervals during his naval career before the second World War[4] and which was sharply enhanced by the British attacks at Dakar and Mers-el-Kebir. This

4. Weekly Intelligence Report, (British) No. 74, August 8, 1941, summarized in a special memorandum from O.N.I., December 23, 1941.

hate he continues to express in violent outbursts to American diplomats.[5] At the same time, Darlan is as con-

5. Leahy to Hull, Vichy, November 11, 1941, #1428; Leahy to Hull, Vichy, December 14, 1941, #1535.

fident of the ultimate triumph of Hitler as are Pucheu and the economic collaborationists and, therefore, regards collaboration as a means to his own advancement. Even the German reverses in Russia and Libya have not shaken his conviction that the Nazis will win the war.[6]

6. Huddle to Hull, Bern, Dec. 20, 1941, #999.

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Darlan's acts during recent months all point to his readiness to buy favor with the Nazis by exerting pressure for the acceptance of German demands, if necessary by acting behind Petain's back. A report by Darlan's intimate on the staff of General Weygand to the effect that the Admiral had had a complete change of heart and looked forward to a German defeat and Weygand's own assertion that Darlan supported his policy in North Africa[7]

7. Murphy to Hull, Algiers, Oct. 3, 1941, #481.

have a completely false ring, since Darlan has been particularly active in weakening the foci of French resistance in North Africa. He supported a scheme to have General Weygand "kicked upstairs" as French Ambassador to Washington, he was instrumental in having Weygand's personal representative at Vichy transferred to Sofia, and he joined with Pucheu in exerting "constant pressure" on Petain for the unconditional removal of Weygand.[8] At the same time he

8. Murphy to Hull, Algiers, Oct. 8, 1941, #498; Leahy to Hull, Vichy, Oct. 10, 1941, #1287; the same, Nov. 8, 1941, #1417; Murphy to Hull, Algiers, Nov. 8, 1941, #566.

authorized German "cultural missions" to North Africa without consulting Weygand, granted the German Armistice Commission greater freedom in Africa, and agreed to shipments of foodstuffs and fuel from the French colonies to Tripolitania.[9]

9. Leahy to Hull, Vichy, Oct. 13, 1941, #1301; Murphy to Hull, Algiers, Nov. 26, 1941, #606; Leahy to Hull, Vichy, Dec. 17, 1941, #1508.

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Darlan has smoothed his collaborationist path by acting without the knowledge of Marshal Petain, for example by keeping the chief of state ignorant of the progress of negotiations for the establishment of German consulates at vital points in French North Africa.[10]

10. Leahy to Hull, Vichy, Nov. 4, 1941, #1405.

Similar acts had become so much the rule that in mid-December Petain himself made a "lengthy and pathetic" denunciation of his relations with Darlan to the French Ambassador to Switzerland, claiming that his second in command was constantly exceeding his authority and deceiving him. One of the Marshal's aides declared at the same time that confidential reports sent to the Foreign Office were withheld from Petain but transmitted by Darlan to the Germans.[11]

11. Huddle to Hull, Bern, Dec. 20, 1941, #899.

The likelihood that Darlan will continue to pursue this collaborationist policy is strengthened by his rivalry with Pucheu. As early as September 30 it was reported that the young Minister of the Interior was no friend of the Admiral and might even succeed in getting rid of him.[12] A fortnight later Darlan was described as

12. Leahy to Hull, Vichy, Sept. 30, 1941. #1242.

viewing "with increasing suspicion" the "growing political ascendancy of the ambitious and unscrupulous Pucheu."[13]

13. Matthews to Hull, Vichy, Oct. 15, 1941, Despatch.

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Since the position of both rivals depends on the goodwill of the Germans, and since Pucheu's reorganization of the French government and economic organization along totalitarian lines is certain to win him the continued support of the Nazis, Admiral Darlan's only hope of remaining at his post and eventually succeeding Petain appears to lie in his outbidding Pucheu for Nazi favor. For this purpose his best, if not his only, weapons are the French fleet and merchant marine and the bases and transport system of metropolitan France and North Africa.